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A Weekly Publication

OF

SERMONS

PREACHED BY

HENRY WARD BEECHER.

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SOUL-GROWTH.

"But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary; and they shall walk and not faint."—Isa. xl., 31.

There are two facts which, in the light of modern philosophizing, are striking. One is that modern piety, much as knowledge has been developed, is obliged to go back thousands of years to the rude ages of the world to find its most fitting expression. All the exquisite experience of the last two thousand years has not framed language which yet equals the utterances of Isaiah, or of David, or of many of the men of old who spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost; and it seems strange that out of a rude age, where physical strength predominated, and where men lived by their senses far more than even now they do, there should have sprung up a vein of experience, a literature, a nomenclature which yet is the best that the world has—but so it is.

The other fact closely connected with this, which has in it some surprise, is that a people like the Israelites, whose religious system had in it no provision for instruction, and no tendency to develop individual independence or self-ministering piety, should have sent forth men whose thought and whose moral impulses have given direction to the religion of the world. For the Mosaic economy was a strictly hierarchical one, and contained in it no provision for the instruction of the common people, and no opportunity in the general services in which they had an individual and independent action. Priests prayed for them; offered sacrifices for them; cleansed them; took care of them; and although there grew up after the Babylonish captivity a system

Sunday Morning, March 7, 1875. Lesson: Isa. xl. Hymns (Plymouth Collection): Nos. 147, 447.

of synagogues, it was not a part of the Mosaic economy. All that knowledge which has made the Jewish name an honored name in time sprang from men that were not accredited as regular teachers. But there was among the Jewish people this peculiarity: namely, they believed in the right and in the liberty of any man or any woman to exercise whatever gifts, to use whatever inspiration, was sent upon them. Out of the recognition of the liberty of the individual sprang up the glorious company of prophets and judges; and the chief spiritual nourishment which we have derived from the Old Testament comes, not from its priesthood, not from the temple, not from the altar, but from the prophets. I will not call them interlopers, because they were not regarded by their own countrymen as such; but they were the men, not official, who had a personal inspiration, and rose up by the side of the regulation religion, the religion of the nation, to exercise their liberty of free thought, and their moral liberty. It was from their hands that the truth came then; and in every age since, principally, it has come, not from men who were officially set to teach, but from men who had such personal impulse, and such special gifts of God, that they were trampled under foot or driven into the wilderness for declaring the divine word as it was revealed to them.

So we have, in such passages as that which I read in your hearing this morning, the glorious disclosure of the universality of the divine presence—of the infinite greatness of God, and his control over all things, with the consummation of them—of the inspiration which God gives to those who believe in him and wait on him—a renewal, especially, of their faith, hope, trust, and power.

The universal law under which men develop is that of variableness. We do nothing continuously except to breathe and pulsate. No man thinks except with intermission, and no man feels except with intermission. It is insanity to think upon one subject incessantly, night and day. Health demands intermission, even retrocession.

That which is true in this limited sphere of individual thought and feeling develops itself in a larger way, in all our pursuits and actions in life. We are not always after pleas-

ure. We are not always after business. We are not always patriotic. We are not always social. We go in rounds. So a thousand concurrent influences at certain times wake us to deep moral and religious thought and feeling. The whole community is pervaded with a spirit which has been dropped down from on high ; nor can any skill or device of men keep the community in that altitude to which it has been brought, beyond certain limited periods. The whole force of human nature beats down the tendency to assume any single condition. Men cannot live perpetually in one mood. To-day a man is in a predominantly intellectual state ; but that spends itself, and the man's nature craves something besides intellect ; and there is a rebound to the social side of his nature. But after pursuing that a certain length of time he is sated there, and the social powers long for release and rest, and he breaks into another development.

Now, regarding religion as a personal and emotive experience, all the endeavors of men to hold Christians, churches or individuals, to a high emotive condition of religious feeling are vain, because they go against the substantial law that is inherent in our minds. We must fluctuate, we must alternate. If you are high in religious feeling to-day that is no reason why you should not be comparatively dry and empty of specific emotive forms of religion to-morrow. The ethical forms go on always. Virtue, morality, the discharge of duties, the ten thousand offices of life which have in them latent religious influences—these are perpetuated ; but even in regard to these we are changing. We are one thing one day, and another thing the next day. Thus human life runs through an infinite series of variations, or changes. A want of knowledge concerning this leads men to put an unnatural force upon themselves ; and this unnatural force often works in a way directly opposite to that which they intend. Religious men who feel that they must always be on the mount exhaust themselves with such endeavors that they rebound, and, instead of being on the mountain, are in the deepest and darkest valley. By their over-exertion they lose their spiritual fervor.

The question arises, then, when intervals of this kind

occur in religious experience, when reactions, backslidings, comparative drought and barrenness take place, How shall men renew? Is there any renewal? How shall that be fulfilled which was declared of old by the prophet, that they who wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; fill up again the exhausted fountain; implete once more the sluggish vein; give pulsation to the heart, clarity to the eye, warmth to affection, zeal to faith?

Men must follow the disclosures of experience, very largely, as to the methods by which this is done. There is in the word of God no recognition of such processes; the method by which spiritual strength may be renewed, augmented, carried to a higher average level, we must learn from a study of the providence of God. We are obliged to take the Bible as men take charts. The harbor of New York is deeper than the paper on which the chart is printed. If you would know of the Swash Channel, or of Gedney's Channel, go out and lower the line and sound it. That will bring you into connection with the fact itself; whereas the chart merely brings you into the shadow or symbol of the fact.

The word of God is simply a chart, and we must go out of the Bible in order to learn what is in it. When it speaks of men, there are no men in it—only the letters which indicate men; and if you would know what men are you must go where they are. A thing that is spoken of in the word of God is but symbolized, shadowed, hinted at, there. If you would know what the thing really is, you must go where you can see it in actual operation, and study it.

So, human life is perpetually the interpreter and commentator of the word of God. The Bible is but a book of dry leaves, printer's ink; but the thing signified is never in printer's ink. Love is not as black as ink: it is as red as blood. You can find it out, not in the Bible, but in the heart. Thought and inspiration are never in a book, though the effects of them may be discerned there. The things themselves must be found in the fire and flash of actual vitality.

"How, then," we are asked, "do you determine that men are to renew their strength and have an impletion of

spiritual influence? What right have you to put your philosophy or your explanation above the declarations of God's word?" I say, I do not put them above the declarations of God's word. I take God's word as a starting-point that gives me a suggestion, as the chart does a man who sets out for a voyage; and I go to the thing itself in life, where God is at work—for human life is his work-shop; and what he does and means we are to find out from the facts of daily experience, not from anything that is cut and dried and hung up in some herbarium.

What, then, are some of the methods by which men, in the divine economy, advance in spiritual impulse, and rise permanently higher?

1. First, we must not be biased by any theory of church or ordinances, nor by any preaching, to suppose that we are shut up to the dealings of God with us through these channels. That the church is a very powerful instrument, and that it will be indispensable through ages, none believe more than I. That ordinances have a value, and that there is a good reason for their maintenance and administration, I, too, very firmly believe. I also believe that preaching is blessed of God to the inspiration and stirring up of men. Why should I disbelieve these things? Why should I seem ever to throw any discredit upon the institutions and usages of the Christian Church? I do not. It is by the truth; it is by the preaching of the truth, though it may be the foolishness of preaching, often; it is by the collected membership in any community which we call the assembly or the church—it is by these that God works very great results among men; but who are you that dare shut up the sovereignty of God, and say that he works only by the church? Who shall dare to say that the great round world, with all its varied influences—its warmth, its heat, its cold, its winter, its summer, its ten thousand different forces, bearing upon men—is not employed of God, as well as the pulpit and moral elements?

Does not the village common school work upon the human soul? Do not books? Do not newspapers? Do not men in all the ten thousand struggles of business? Do not all the

influences which go to make up the swarming and ever-teeming society? Is there any thing which God does not use in operating upon the reason, the affections, and the moral sentiments of men? Is not he the God of the whole earth? and does he not employ whatever touches or modifies the human mind to mould men from low to high, from poor to better, and from better to best?

It is not because I regard these things as less than good that I caution you not to depend exclusively upon the church, or upon the reading of the Bible: I believe that God gives to them signal efficacy; but I believe, also, that he employs a thousand other things by which to exert his influence in the world. I believe that the heavens distill it, that the clouds bear it, and, overhanging us, drop it down. I believe it comes with the scents and odors of summer. I believe that it mingles with the joys and sorrows of men. I believe that it accompanies the ten thousand influences which shift and change men. God works by churches, and he works in spite of them. He works by ministers—and it is hard work, often. He works by ignorant and imperfect men, and he compensates for their ignorance and imperfection by the use of other influences. He works by everything. The universality, the infinite variety of the working of the divine Spirit, I fain would bear in on your minds.

When, therefore, men say, "How shall we renew our spiritual strength and experience?" it is not enough for me to say, "Listen to preaching, take the communion, read your Bible, and say your prayers." If I were to tell you this alone, and you were to put it in practice, you would soon discover that it was not wise instruction; for you would find that though you observed all the ordinances of the church, your spiritual strength and experience was not renewed. Thousands and thousands of weary souls testify that having done all that was required of them by their religious system, they received very little if any appreciable profit.

2. It pleases God to make the spiritual development of men depend on time-growth. We know how it is with children. We know that they develop first by the body. Then come, secondly, the social affections, with the elementary forms of

the intellect. Nor can you force things in a normal and healthy child. You must take it in the hour of God's appointment. The body you may call all manner of names; you may despise the body; but a soul without a body is like a candle without a candlestick; nay, it is like a wick without a candle; nay, it is like a flame trying to live without a wick. The body is the foundation on which we all start; and we have to wait; and we learn to wait in respect to our children.

Then comes the next stage—that of the unfolding of affection and intelligence; and the intelligence is generally the effect, not of the relations of facts, but of the percipience of the senses. It is not usually the fruit of reflection or reasoning. Next begin to develop the moral elements. Third in the order of time, and last, is the spiritual nature—for I distinguish between the moral, as including in itself the whole range of ethical truth, and the spiritual, which I understand to be the highest form of mental activity by which men discern invisible qualities or existences, or that whole action of the mind which is supersensuous, not being confined to the law of the senses, but belonging to the higher range of mentality.

I think in men, and in women, often, the development of a higher spiritual percipience and emotion is the result of time and growth. Therefore, persons going into the church early in life, whether they go in upon a profession of their faith, or by birthright, or through confirmation, or by any of the different methods by which they are said to become Christians, or by which they are taught to think themselves to be Christians—such persons are not prepared for the higher forms of spiritual development, simply because they are not ripe, or are not mature.

Did you ever see how flowers grow—how first, lifting the clod, they develop two great leaves; how, out of these leaves, sucking up all that is in them, the stem begins to come forth; and how it grows through weeks and months? It breaks the ground in April; but August comes, and there is nothing yet except the stem, which is still growing and branching. Go out, if you please, and say to it, "O Aster, latest of all flowers, do you know how many flowers

in the hedge and on the road-side have blossomed the moment they were out of the ground—tulips, hyacinths, crocuses, jonquils?—and here you have been growing for three months, and you do not show a blossom nor a bud!" No, and it will not for some time yet. But by and by, when October comes, if you will go out into the field, you will see that its time has come in the order of its own growth, and that it begins to show the tips of little buds. And when the early spring-blossoming flowers are forgotten, and their very leaves are withered and gone away, then, when the frosts impend, and the hoarse northern winds begin to pipe their coming, the aster stands by, and irradiates the field; and it stays till winter slays it. We rejoice in the earliest flower because it is the earliest, and we rejoice in the latest flower because it is the latest; but do what you will, you cannot make the aster blossom in spring. You must wait until the time for it to blossom arrives.

Now, among men the same thing happens. There are those who have a premature development of spiritual impulses. There are children that develop these impulses early; but, fortunately, they die quickly, and go to heaven; and their lives go into Sunday-school libraries. But because the higher nature of some people is unfolded early, are we to make them the criterion for other people? You might as well go out to an apple-tree that ripens its fruit in October, and say, "Here is a yellow apple that was ripened in September," and blame it for not ripening its apples in September. Would you, in September, say to an apple-tree whose fruit does not ripen until October, "Hurry up! hurry up! your apples ought to be ripe"? The tree that ripens its fruit early is pursuing its normal course; and the tree that ripens its fruit late is pursuing its normal course.

Many persons develop high religious emotions prematurely; and it is not desirable. It is better not to seek to produce ecstatic experiences in anticipation of the normal methods. Spiritual fervors thus produced are almost invariably artificial, not only, but drugging and deteriorating. Many persons begin to develop by the law of growth; but they have not ripeness. The strings are not stretched across

their mind from which can vibrate certain influences or truths. Persons renew, or are said to renew, their spiritual fervor, when they come, late in life, or in mid-life, into any considerable realization of the power of God, of faith in God, of insight into the heavenly influence, or into royalty of Christian experience; and often, when they come into that state, they turn themselves about, and say, "Oh, how much I have lost! If I had begun early, if I had been in this frame of mind from the time that I was ten years old, what a joyful life I should have had!" Oh, yes, that is so; but because my grapes are so sweet in October, I never think of going out and saying, "O Catawba! O Iona! If you had only been as sweet as this in June what a nice time I should have had eating you all summer long!" I do not reason so about fruits or flowers; nor is it wise to reason so about people.

Many may lose by neglect, or by delay; but there is an element of time which must be taken into consideration. There is a certain rawness or ungrowth of mind which makes it impossible for persons to develop the higher spiritual states until they have gone through a given number of years.

3. Then there are many persons who renew their strength, who develop into a higher spiritual life, into more fervor, more joy, and more stability by reason of the removal of false or imperfect views of truth.

There are many persons who are taught to believe that if they have not grace it is some fault of theirs. The minister hammers on that, saying to them, "It is your own fault, it is your want of faith and diligence, it is your neglect to use the means of grace"—whatever that may be. So they go home, and have a kind of constriction; their conscience troubles them; they wish they could do whatever is necessary to secure the desired end; they try, with a sort of half-physical endeavor; they read a little more, and study a little more; but they do not get any further along. They say, "The minister says it is my fault, and I suppose it is; but they cannot tell how or why."

One looks out through a window of plain, perfectly clear glass, and seeing a beautiful landscape he admires it, and

calls another to see it; but while the other is coming, the sash with the clear glass is thrown up, and a sash with ground glass is thrown down. He looks, and says, "I cannot see any beautiful landscape." And the other says, "It is your own fault. You do not keep the window clear." The man commences rubbing the window to get off the dirt, but he can not see through it. Nobody can see through ground glass, I do not care whether there are spiders' webs on it or not. The first man said, "I looked through the window and saw a beautiful landscape;" but he did not say, "I saw it through a different medium from that which you are trying to look through." The other man said, "You say that you see beautiful things, and that it is my fault that I do not see them. I have come early and late, and at all seasons, but I have not seen those beautiful things. It may be my fault, but I don't think it is."

If persons are brought up under such instruction that they have false or imperfect views of God, of the divine character, and of spiritual truths, how can they, looking through these ground-glass views, or these grimed views, see the beautiful things that lie beyond them?

We will suppose that I have been brought up to believe that God is a thorough-going policeman, and that being perfect himself, he says, "Now, look out! For every word and every thought that is wrong, young man, I will bring you into judgment." I imagine that he watches, day and night; that his eye is constantly on me. I regard him as a jealous God, as a spying God, as a rigorous God, as a God that loves some when he has brought them within a certain line, but that looks upon all who are outside of that line without allowance, and with a determination of justice. To me, he is a God that loves justice more than he does humanity; that loves law better than he does men. Suppose the heaven were full of a God like that? The more there is of such a God the worse it is. We will suppose I am attempting to love him. I look up, and see storms; but I cannot love storms.

Suppose John Zundel should instruct you and me in music, and suppose he should say to us, "If you are going to be true musicians, you must love this"—making one of

the most hideous discords that was ever brought out of a screeching organ? Suppose he should say, "Don't you like it?" and we should say "No;" and he should say, "It is because you are so unregenerate and depraved"?

There is a relation between things and things—between quality and quality. I cannot love things that are bitter, with a certain kind of bitterness; but I can love things that are sweet, with a certain kind of sweetness; and there is a relation between a man's reason and things that are reasonable. There is a human sense of justice which is the foundation on which every man must be just, or determine what is just. There are qualities which the race esteems as good or bad; and they do it because they are founded in the nature of things. If you take away from them that which is primary and rudimentary, the axioms of right and wrong, you destroy their moral sense, and all their capacity for moral development.

Now, if you destroy that in God himself, how much worse is it! If it is wrong for Nero to be a tyrant, is it not more wrong for God to be one? If to love blood; if to overhang a Roman amphitheatre, and see men drinking blood as if it were wine; if to rejoice in the contests of beasts and slaves, and in all forms of athletic cruelty; if to gloat over such things; if for a man to feel himself an emperor because he has brute power—if these things are hideous in Caligula, or in Nero, is it right for God to sit in heaven and look down into hell, and rejoice that out of the thirty millions who die every year, probably twenty-nine and a-half millions go down there? To teach me that that is God, and to call on me to look up and admire him, and say, "That is beautiful"—every instinct of Christianity, every sweet affection of my nature, everything that is noblest and best in me, abhors it. These extreme forms of statement are seldom advanced now, in school or church, yet if Christ is not transformed and made hideous by the exposition of men, at least they do not make him beautiful. The preaching of the divine nature to a very large extent is anything but attractive. It is not made drawing to men. The beauty of holiness; that glory of God which he declares stands in his patience, in his gentleness,

in his long-suffering, in his love, in his power to suffer for others rather than to make them suffer—how little is this preached among men!

So persons are brought up, under a rigorous system, frequently, thinking themselves not to be drawn to religion because they are depraved. They do not like preaching, and they suppose that is because they are depraved. Neither do they like Sunday; and they assign the same reason for that.

Sunday! I used to be a pin-cushion, and duties used to be pins, when I was a boy; and I did not like it when they stuck them into me. Therefore, Sunday was the dreadful day of the week to me. There were some Sundays of my boyhood which stand in my memory as among the most beautiful things in the world; and yet, while I believe that the world would suffer irreparable loss in the abolition of Sunday, or in its secularization, on the other hand in order to preserve Sundays you must make them beautiful, honorable and desirable. Intelligent natures must find in them that which feeds the really best things which are in them. If these days are only hoops, strings, manacles; if they are only "Thou shalt not, thou shalt not, thou shalt not"; if they are burdensome, it is worse than if you were to eradicate their existence altogether.

That which is true of Sunday is true of the church, and every part of its service. If you hold up inspiring themes of religion in such a way that they are clouded, misconceived, absolutely perverted, how can you expect men to rise? Frequently, when persons have been brought up in one communion where they are not developed and built up in their religious nature, they go to some other communion, where they have a different kind of preaching, and fall in with new kinds of books, or statements, or doctrines, or philosophies, as the case may be, and their difficulties are cleared away, and they break forth into a higher experience, and they feel, "There is a better life opening in me." Their spiritual strength is renewed, not only, but they seem to be created afresh, and they rise into a glorious communion with God.

Now, I declare I would rather see a person—a young man or a young woman—go out of the Protestant church and

come under the ministration of one of my brethren of the Roman Catholic Church, than not have that person grow. If you are in a state of adumbration here, if you cannot see the truth, and if something is not done for you here which breaks the cloud and lets out the glory, and if you can go elsewhere and be helped by picture, or statue, or robe, or service, I say to you, "Go." Your spiritual growth is more to me, and ought to be more to you, than any orthodoxy or regularity of Protestantism. There is nothing on earth which is to be compared, for one moment, to the breaking of the soul out of a lower life into a higher realm; and if a man can be benefited spiritually by going among the Swedenborgians, or the Roman Catholics, or the Unitarians, or the Lutherans, or the Episcopalians, or the Presbyterians, or the Baptists, or the Methodists; if his nature can be enlarged and lifted up by the words of this or that poet, or preacher, or philosopher; if he can be carried up in his thoughts and feelings and actions by the finesse of reasoning or the glamour of imagination, let him avail himself of these instrumentalities, no matter where he may find them. The question is, What is it that stands related to the true growth of any individual soul? and when that is determined it is the right of this soul to seek it. It is more important that he be hatched than that any particular bird hatches him!

So it comes to pass, often, that men, drawn from one relation to another, receive, by reason of their change of circumstances, and the new influences which are brought to bear upon them, a great impetus in their life. They are apt to suppose that the credit lies in the power of the preacher; but in this they are mistaken. A man comes to this church, and hears me preach, and says, "That is the kind of preaching I like." He comes again and again; and after six months, eight months, or a year, he is in the full disclosure of Christian experience; and he says: "Ah! that is because Mr. Beecher preaches so." Poor soul! it is not. I simply preach in the natural and ordinary way; but you have been brought out of the circumstances where the truth was hidden from you, and you are brought into circumstances in which my preaching happens to be medicinal to your particular case.

All your life and education have stood between you and the future, and I happen to be the instrument that draws the curtain and lets you see the real picture. No strength, no eloquence, no great wisdom, but God, has brought you where, at last, you get a view of the heavenly land, of the spiritual life, of our everlasting home. No human power lifts you up; it is the power of God that lifts you.

A ship is stuck on a mud-bank; and, the tide going out, it careens over, and there it lies, like many discouraged Christians. They do not need to anchor. The anchor is out, though. By and by the tide begins to come in, little by little. The captain calls up the crew, and orders them to hoist in the anchor. It is hoisted in, and stowed away. "Trim the sails," is the next command; and that is obeyed. The tide is still coming in, coming in, coming in; and by and by the vessel floats off; and the crew look up with admiration, and say, "What a captain we have! It was the hauling in of the anchor and the trimming of the sails that saved us. The captain gave his orders, they were obeyed, and then she floated." No, it was not the captain's doings. The Lord God, who swings the stars through the heavens, and exerts his power upon the ocean, did it. The captain merely foresaw the coming of the tide, and adapted the circumstances of the vessel to influences which existed before.

So the plenary inspiration of the Spirit of God fills the heaven and the earth; and when men are brought into conjunctions of circumstances where they meet the tide of divine influence, and receive comfort, the power is not in him who happened to draw aside the curtain and the screen, but in the mightiness of God who lies behind these things.

4. There are many persons who fail to come to the light of truth, and to the inspiration of the higher views of religion, by reason of worldly prosperity, which tends to satisfy their lower nature. Under such circumstances it is, that, in the divine ordering of things, what are called distresses, infirmities, and even great sorrows, are blessed of God to the opening of their nature and to the renewing of their spiritual strength.

Thus, it is the experience of thousands of men that sick-

ness has been greatly blessed to them. Men have an arrogance of health, and they do not feel how much they depend upon the sovereignty of God and nature in a thousand ways. I think that, to a strong man, next to the sense of power is the sweetness of dependence. I think nobody feels this sweetness so much as those who are strongest. Men like the exercise of power; that it is pleasant, everybody knows; but, after all, the sense of leaning, the longing for something better and higher and stronger than you are on which you can lean, is a source of still greater satisfaction. When men are in their strength, and are actors in their various spheres, that part of their nature which leads one to desire something to lean upon is not developed. But sickness comes, and they are made helpless and despondent; and under such circumstances they begin to feel, "How frail my power is! The difference between one mouthful and another sets me all wrong. A hasty walk or a little imprudence, when I am recovering, throws me down again. I am not so omnipotent, or so near omnipotence, as I thought I was." The sense of the power of the Ruler, or of God over all—what may be called the humiliation of bone and muscle as well as of spirit and soul—this takes place in men; and frequently the best thing that ever happens to a man is a fit of sickness which changes his whole life. To be sure, when men are sick they are always going to be pious. They do not always fulfill their intentions, but in many cases they do. So that which would at first seem to be obscuration, and a reason for lamentation, turns out to be one of the greatest comforts and blessings of life.

Often, in times of drought, wells give out; and in the West, where wells are shallow, when they became dry we used to go down and dig deeper till we struck water again, putting new casings inside of the old ones—for the wells used to be lined with wood. When another drought came, we used to go down again and repeat the process. This we continued till we got the wells so deep that they never gave out.

Troubles are well-diggers. Men find their pleasures pretty near the top of the soil; but troubles and sorrows

sink wells in them deeper and deeper, till, by and by, they stand, and are never dry, and are wells of water springing up to everlasting life in their souls. Sorrows and troubles are great benefactors. And the same is true of bereavements, great losses, and various hindrances.

Men never could see the corona of the sun—the red flame that surrounds that orb—until the sun was eclipsed; and the corona, the light, the glory of God is seen when men are under eclipse and in darkness. There are revelations made to men then which prosperity never brings to them. We are rich and strong, not by the things which we possess, but by the amount of true manhood which is developed in us.

5. It pleases God, also, to employ the companionship of friends and neighbors in developing men in the direction of their higher manhood. There is nothing that is so helpful to a soul as the contact of another soul. When you go through the door of thought, that is a visitation to be desired; but our Master, Jesus, is himself an Exemplar, and teaches us that, not his Sermon on the Mount, not his discourses by the way, healed the blind man, but his taking hold of the blind man's hand, and walking with him out of the village into the country, and then, with arm about him, laying his hand upon his eyes. It was his personal touch; and it is soul-touch, after all, that is the most helpful and most powerful influence that is brought to bear upon men in the world.

The peace of God, which passeth all understanding—if a man has this, and carries it with him, and it falls upon another man, there is more inspiration in it, and there is more instruction in it, than in a thousand books. Madam Guion's life has led and misled thousands of persons; and yet, doubtless, she, in her personal presence, was a blessing to almost every one whom she met. You who have cheer in you are God's missionaries of comfort to those who are naturally opaque-minded. It is a talent which God has given you, and you never exercise it. Many persons keep mirthfulness as a music-box on a shelf. God gave them an equipage of soul which the world wants, groaning and weeping in overmeasure for the lack of it; and yet it lies dormant in them. They have

it in their power to throw light and cheer upon the ways of life, and make men more buoyant and courageous in the midst of their cares and troubles, and they do not do it. Many men who are mirthful and genial could, if they would, throw over the hardships and trials of their fellow men a radiance which should illuminate their path, but they neglect to do so.

Well, I suppose it would set me outside of the pale of home missionaries if I were to say that a person could oftentimes do more for a sick person by a joke than by a prayer; but it is true, whether you like it or not. Many a man has been winged by prayers to the very gate of heaven, and many a man has been sunk into the very slough of despond by prayers. While many prayers are Jacob's ladders, easy of ascent and descent, many other prayers are dungeons—except that they are darker and damper than any dungeon ever was.

So that, frequently, companionship is the best thing in the world. I ought to say it. I am what I am, by the grace of God, through my old friend Moody—not Moody and Sankey of England, but a man that was at Amherst College, a class or two above me. He was a person of great piety, and he was given much to prayer, night and day; but, glory be to God, he had good common sense; and he took me by the hand. It was at a time when I was in the most morbid conditions of mind. I was sweltering under those views of moral government and divine nature which seemed as though they would suffocate me, and I was trying to eradicate common sense from my mind, that I might be pious—then it was that this man took me by the hand; and the encouragement, the hope, the comfort, which he threw upon me brings tears to my eyes when I think of it. Now he has gone to heaven, and therefore he hears what I say, and rejoices. I remember him more than all others. Dear old Doctor Humphrey, the president, I revered. He gave me certain sentiments of moral sturdiness. Right is right, and come what will, let the heavens fall, justice shall be done—I got much of that from him; and from my own father I got a good deal of courage and enthusiasm; but the trust which weakness may put in love I got from Mr. Moody; the sense of Christ's

favor for unworthy men, because their souls needed some other heart to brood them, I also got from Mr. Moody; and I never shall thank him until I go where he will not need any thanks.

Now, what is largely called "the fellowship of the saints" is very poor indeed. I recollect, when I was a boy, being taken into what was called a "Mother's meeting," where twelve or fifteen sad-hearted women would get together and pray for their children. They prayed for me; and if I had derived my notion of the communion of the saints from them, I think I should totally have misconceived the most glorious element which there is in our mortal life.

Let any one go into the average country prayer-meeting. Tallow candles are hung around on the walls. There are a dozen or twenty persons present, scattered about the room, one here, another there, another over there, and so on. A man, generally the minister, stands in the desk, and reads a chapter, and makes a regulation prayer. Then a deacon gets up and, as usual, talks about our living below our privileges. Another deacon gets up and descants on the duty of laying down the weapons of our rebellion. By and by, after a certain number of regulation prayers have been made, and hymns have been sung, and remarks have been offered, the hour is out, and the people get up, and they go out, and are very happy indeed that the meeting is over. It is your duty to love the communion of the saints, it is said; but any child ought to be whipped if he liked that. It is unnatural. It is stupid.

Take two persons who feel that it is their duty to talk on the subject of religion. A man gets up in the morning with his head full of business and care. He meets a brother church-member in the street, and thinks he ought to have communion with him. Although he is thinking about notes and bargains, he says, "Well, Brother Corning, how is your soul to-day?" The reply is, "Well, thank God, I am pretty well." After having thus exchanged about half-a-dozen sentences, and satisfied their consciences, they go into a discussion about the things which they are really thinking of. They have a good talk about stocks; about the state of the

market; about profit and loss. The whole current of their thoughts runs in the channel of business. There is a vast amount of this mechanical communion—of talking about religion because it is thought to be a duty.

Now, genuine spiritual communion is a very different thing from that. When persons have real life in their souls; when they have real peace, real sweetness, real faith, real hope, there is nothing in this world that is comparable to the quiet, natural, unrestrained interchange of thought and feeling—or if there be not interchange of thought and feeling, then to the reception of them as imparted by those who are filled with them, and are God's ministers to the soul in that direction.

A man tells me that I ought to be a lover of flowers. Upon his invitation, I go into his library and see his herbarium. He has put into leaves a large collection of flowers that are dried, and that have lost their color and fragrance. There is a prevailing smell of hay among them all. But I make believe that I like them. "Oh," I say, "these roses are delicious! Oh, how sweet these violets are!" So I go through the whole collection.

That is very much like Christian people, who go through all sorts of experiences making believe that they like them, when they don't.

I saw, behind a hotel in Switzerland, a fine garden, and I unexpectedly found there American flowers; and being far away from home, and half home-sick, they afforded me great pleasure, and I went into ecstasy over them. Every one of them seemed like a message to me full of affection, by association; and I did not need anything to help me love and praise them.

Now, where there is a real fragrance; in the garden of the Lord, where there is all that is manly and good—there it is the best thing in the world for those who meet to be in communion with each other; but I despise all regulation duties of this kind.

6. Not to protract further the opening of this subject, I may say that when, by the use of these various instrumentalities—by the use of true views; of communion with men; and

of the sanctifying influence of our avocations in life—our souls have grown, and have come into the possibility of a higher spiritual disclosure, then I believe that there is a further soul-growth in us. I believe that God works through the natural world until we are able to be influenced through the social world; that then he works through the social world until we are able to be influenced through the higher forms of church association and teaching; and that, by-and-by, when, through these lower instrumentalities the soul has been stored with knowledge and experience, we come to a state in which there is a direct influence of the soul of God exerted upon us—as direct as sight and voice are to the bodily senses. I believe that the divine Spirit comes into the hearts of men in ways that are inexplicable to the lower understanding, and that, therefore, men who are on the lower plane of life do not comprehend. I believe that when men come to a higher Christian life they have days of spiritual insight; and that these days grow longer and longer, like the days of the coming summer, when the sun goes down later and later, and rises earlier and earlier. I believe that as the result of a whole life of education and practice in divine duties, men may come, at last, into that state in which the Spirit of God shines with a steadfast lustre upon them. Then there is the triumph of grace in the soul. Then intuitions become truths—not fitful, not irregular, not based upon inchoate and undigested knowledge, but constant, regular, and founded on sound judgment. I believe that when men have well-proved knowledge, and wholesome habits thoroughly established, and their higher spiritual nature is growing and opening toward God—I believe that then the prophet-gift comes to them, so that they almost foresee, and almost see with the bodily eye, the God who is invisible to the flesh.

I do not wonder—when saints begin to decay, or fall away so far as their outward bodies are concerned; I do not wonder—when they are dying, and the external ear and eye lose their power—then I do not wonder that the inward ear catches the sound of heavenly music, and that the inward eye beholds the angels of God coming. I do not wonder that children, dying, reach out their hands and call "Mother,"

and that mothers, dying, reach out their hands to greet their children. As we near the great spiritual reality, and the world, the flesh, and matter are losing power, then the emancipated soul is like a bird that has gone up from branch to branch, until at last it sits upon the topmost bough, utters one sweet song, and flies far away through the air. I do not wonder that the spirit rejoices, sings, and disappears singing, that it may appear in Zion and before God.

Christian brethren, this view it is the privilege of all to have. It is the privilege of all to live the life of which I have been speaking: not to-day nor to-morrow, but as the result of patient continuance in well doing, growing in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

And now, dear brethren, when the blessing is pronounced we will join together around the table which celebrates Him who has revealed these truths to us in their most potential forms; and I invite all of you who are in the Lord Jesus Christ by faith, whether you are in the church or not, or whatever church you are in; I invite every one of you who believes in the indispensable need of God's forgiveness and quickening grace; I invite such of you as are in earnest, and have to-day the witness in yourselves that you accept the goodness of God through Jesus Christ; I invite all who would be glad to express their love for the Saviour by the most affecting of all symbolization, his broken body and his blood; I invite every sinful man or woman, every despairing soul that begins to have hope in Jesus Christ—I invite you to become brethren with us for the hour, and partake with us of these emblems.

PRAYER BEFORE THE SERMON.*

We rejoice, our Father, that thou art hidden from us, not because being high thou art haughty, and dost wrap thyself from thine inferiors; we rejoice that thou art obscure or hidden only while there is not in us that which can comprehend thee; and that by growing in grace we may grow in the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. We rejoice that there is provision for our rising to the consciousness of thy presence, and of thy nature, and of thy character, and somewhat to an understanding of thy government. None of us by searching can find thee out altogether or understand the Almighty unto perfection; but we may come near to thee, and understand more of thee than we do of father or mother, of brother or sister, or of friend. Thou canst be more to the soul than all other beings. Those that trust thee, and love thee, and are born into the spiritual life with thee, thou canst fill by thy power with all strength, courage and understanding. Thou canst clothe them with thoughts of thee. We rejoice that the testimonies from day to day of thy servants of far away years are recorded. The patriarchs and prophets, the apostles and martyrs, a thousand witnesses in every age, testify that in sickness, in sorrow, in persecution, in hardships, in all ways of trouble thou art able to send through the storm, the calm; through the darkness, the light; and through weakness, strength. Thou hast in thyself the resources which universal being needs; and thou dost not withhold, but dost give forth liberally. Thou art as the sun that doth not shine asking how much anything can hold, but that poureth itself abroad with infinite abundance, overflowing and transcending the wants of all that are upon the earth. And so thou dost grant of thyself unto us, not according to the measure which we have in ourselves, but according to the greatness of thine own being; and thou dost please thyself in giving of thine own generosity. Thine own benevolence, thine own love and thine own goodness are the measures—not our desert, nor even our want. Thou dost pour from thyself through the universe the vital spirit. It is of thee, thy life imparting life, rearing it up in gradations, through the ages, that, at last, in the consummation of all things thou mayest make appear what thou art by what thou hast done; and thou wilt have distributed the knowledge of thyself in so many ranks and gradations that spirits, thrones, dominions, principalities, angels, archangels, all that have kept their first estate, and all that have come up from the lowest planes, step by step, shall know thee, shall understand thee, and shall rejoice in thee. And then all other things shall pass away as needed no longer. Thou wilt be the day, and thou wilt be the night. There shall be no sun, nor moon, nor shining of the stars. There shall be no city and no temple. The Lord God shall have in himself all that all do need; and we shall rise into the joy of infinite blessedness.

We rejoice that so many behold, even dimly, this bright vision of

* Immediately following the reception of members into the church.

the coming estate. We rejoice that so many are drawn toward it, and are verifying thy promises to those who call on thee.

This morning we have received into our number a new company that seek to walk with us to the land of the blessed. We pray that thou wilt give to them the same grace which thou hast given to hundreds and thousands who have companied with us in days gone by, and who are still with us. And yet, how many are upon the other side; how many that laid foundations with us; how many that went forth in counsel, and prayer, and labor with us; how many whose voices sounded rejoicingly in our ears in the songs of earth! Still they are ours. Still there is communion of the saints. The church on earth and the church above are in communion. The spirits of the blessed look upon us as we gather together in the old familiar places, and rejoice over us as by faith we lift ourselves up to rejoice in them. Theirs is the victory; ours is yet the struggle; but the victory is as sure for us as it was for them. Ours yet are tears; theirs are smiles everlasting; but thou shalt wipe away every tear from every eye of those who yet linger in this lower sphere.

O Lord, our God, we beseech of thee, as one and another come into the communion of thy people, and into church relationships, that they may have administered unto them, not the superstition of outward membership, but the hidden communion of the divine Spirit, and that they may feel that the sources of their strength are in God. Grant that Jesus Christ may become to them a well-conceived object of joy and faith. Grant, we pray thee, that it may be a sweet and pleasant thing for them to walk in the ways of righteousness; and may they find them ways of peace. Deliver them from temptations which are mightier than their own purposes. Deliver them from despondency and distrust. Make them strong, not in themselves, nor in their own will, but in the Lord. And we pray that thou wilt bring many more out of darkness into light, and from the world into communion with the people of God.

We beseech of thee that thou wilt fulfill all thy promises to every one who waits upon thee. Behold expectant hearts to-day. Look down upon this congregation. How many are the wants which move souls toward thee in silence! How many are the sorrows of many hearts! How many with bitter memories come to-day into thy presence for help! How many are there whose hearts ache—those of parents for children, those of brothers and sisters for each other, and those of husbands and wives for each other! How many are there who need thee in their homes, in their dispositions, in their relationships in life one to another! Grant thy grace unto every one. As his day may his strength be, not only, but day by day give him that bread which comes down from heaven, and which feeds the soul, and strengthens it in all its nobler aspirations.

And we beseech of thee that thou wilt quicken all who believe, that they may walk in the way of duty; that they may search out neglected duties; that they may take upon themselves the whole service of God; and if there be those who stand looking wistfully upon this congregation and upon this church from without, O Lord, we pray that they may be drawn by that same sweet spirit of hope

and promise which hath drawn us. May the love of Christ constrain them; and may they begin that higher and better life with higher aspirations—that life which overcomes this world by the power of faith. Grant that they may, at last, take the first steps, and commence that journey which, if it be steep and troublesome in the beginning, grows more and more easy until it enters the kingdom of God above.

We pray that thou wilt bless all the churches that are gathered together to-day. May all thy ministering servants be taught of God, and be equipped to preach the whole truth as it is in Christ Jesus. We pray for all the instrumentalities by which light and knowledge are diffused throughout our land. We pray that thou wilt extend the work of teaching among the neglected; of preaching the Gospel in places that are weak and destitute and afar off. We pray that thou wilt send forth in every part of the earth those who are consecrated to the work of spreading the knowledge of God, until, in every land, on every continent, in every dark place on the globe, the light and the glory of Christ shall shine forth victoriously.

Let thy kingdom come, let thy will be done and fill the whole earth with thy glory. We ask it for Christ Jesus' sake. *Amen.*

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